1996
THE YEAR TELSTAR CAME TO PLAY

TELSTAR
Electronic Studios

TELSTAR ELECTRONIC STUDIOS -
past, present and future

The Telstar group of companies is a strange beast. Most of us are already familiar with the name, having seen it slapped on those compilation CDs that seem to flit in and out of the top 10 on a regular basis. Telstar has been producing such compilations since 1982, and as a result it has become the largest independent record company in the UK. It has also allowed the firm to diversify into other areas, with interactive entertainment placed high up in the order of priorities. Telstar Fun&Games/Telstar Electronic Studios has been trading within the computer games market for three years now, and to date it has concentrated much of its time compiling other publishers' products within the games console market. This came about as a response to product being over-purchased by other publishers, which Fun&Games then bought and repackaged as a "two for the price of one" offer under the Fun&Games label. The double-packs proved immensely successful and this quickly led to further developments in the games area. As the popularity of cartridge machines such as the SNES and Mega Drive started to tail off, Telstar turned its attention towards PC CD-ROM.

By adopting a similar strategy for bundling together decent games in budget double-packs, Telstar soon realised the potential for PC software and set about creating two new labels – retaining the old Fun&Games label for re-releases, and establishing Telstar Electronic Studios as its new software publishing arm.

The following pages outline the Studio's initial original releases, along with some of the forthcoming titles you can expect to see in late 1996/97.

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heading up telstar electronic studios is managing director mark livingstone (left) and development director gary bracey

contents

TELSTAR Electronic Studios

PC ZONE

Fable

All is not well in the Lands of the Balkhanes. The Mecubarz are extremely unhappy – first because they wish they had a proper name like normal people, instead of something so clearly plucked at random from a Fantasy Name Catalogue; and second, because the humans over which they have ultimate power are revolting (cue the insertion of the 'revolting' joke of your choice at this point). All of which, if you think about it, is a bit silly on the part of the humans, given that the Mecubarz wield (as I've already mentioned, please pay attention) ultimate power over all and sundry.

The exotically-named landlords are so dismayed at the shamelessly treacherous acts being committed by the feeble, spindly-limbed, hairy-orificed types under their charge that they place a curse on the Balkhanes. Henceforth they will be subdivided into four cursed (pronouced 'cur-sed') lands under the control of four Twisted Overlords, who will ensure that the people therein are well and truly under the thumb and that each world will have different weather conditions. But only one each. How twisted can you get? One land will be permanently blanketed under twenty feet of snow; another will be fated with incessant driving rain; and so on. Clearly the Mecubarz are a species of superior beings and not to be messed
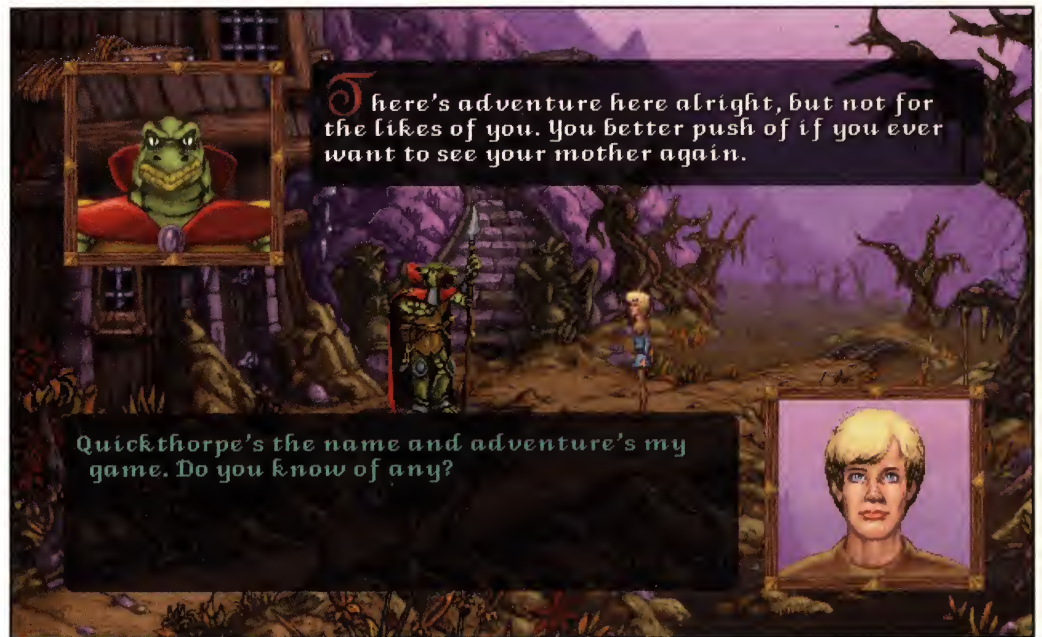
> you could hardly say that quickthorpe is a mean contender in the "witty retort" stakes, could you now?

with – cross these guys and you might as well kiss your carefully planned crop rotation systems goodbye, buster.

Needless to say, the meteorological offices in the various lands are not best pleased by this turn of events, because they've lost their cushy cash in hand slots at the end of the news; the fashion designers are pissed off too (the stamping of Berkinstocked feet can be heard from the next solar system) because no one

needs four sets of silly clothing; while the people of the land who enjoy a moderate morning temperature which rises to a hot, sunny afternoon with light sea breezes, a warm evening and brief overnight rain, are thoroughly hacked off because now everyone else wants to live in their bit (apparently the Twisted Overlord in charge of that particular section is a bit new to the job. He'll learn). Nobody can see a solution to this terrible state of
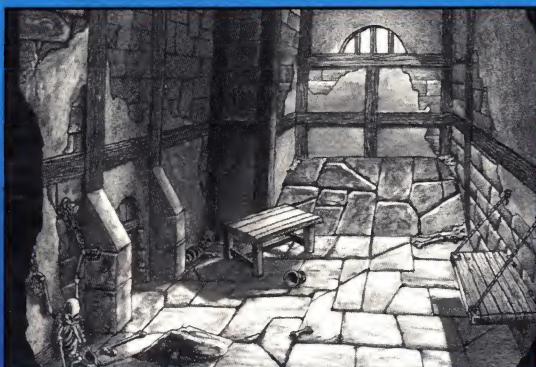
> come the morning after the party, barry and ian had the worst humdinger of a hangover they'd ever known.
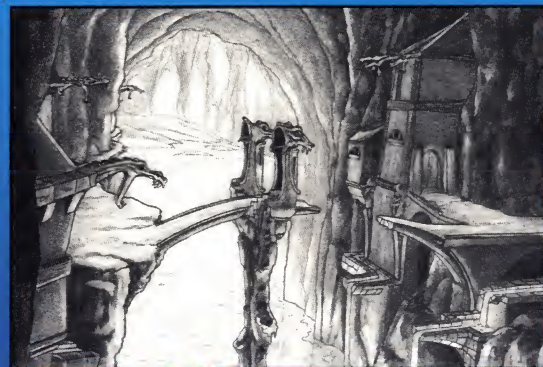
> fantasy-world architects have notoriously small attention spans and almost always forget to finish their bridges.

patrick mccarthy's original lengthy and complicated introduction for this preview was based on a play of words which ridiculed lester piggott's poor pronunciation of the word 'table'. but it was crap, so we dropped it.

The Land of Mists

The Swamp Path
Quickthorpe

travel through the lands of the mists

experience a spot of bother crossing the sea

fable offers an excellent window system for viewing both objects and your inventory.

The jar is full of water.

Inventory

Inventory

get involved in a strop with genies

check 'em out! the backdrops were first drawn by hand and then rendered with some superb lighting effects.
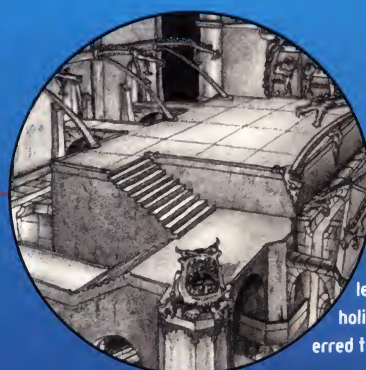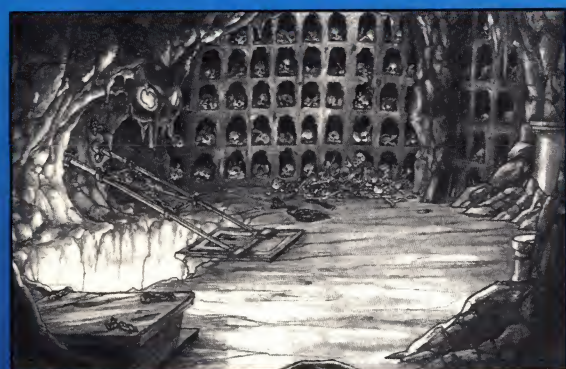
as the *pc zone* mob have learned to their cost, club 18-30 holiday accommodation has always erred towards the rather basic.
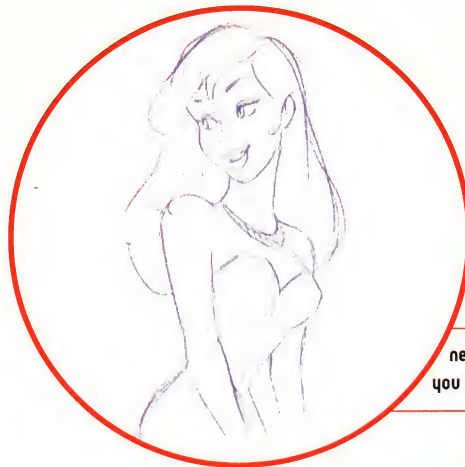
quickthorpe

This is the chap you'll be controlling in the game. As you can see, in close-up he rather resembles the bastard lovechild of Peter Noone and Sue Barker. Never mind, at least from a distance he looks more like Dennis Bergkamp – either that or a lanky streak of piss with an inflatable head and a Stray Cat haircut. Take your pick.

Quickthorpe (crazy name, crazy guy) and all the main characters in the game hail from the feverish braincells of an ex-Disney animator. Funny how Disney animators all seem to think that a blonde, fresh-faced blando-type will have universal appeal simply because they're considered appealing in the States, a country whose obsession with such physical attributes clearly stemming from a prototype such as John Boy from *The Waltons*. Now there's a clean-cut youth if ever there was one, a boy who could be held up as an example to America's children – he doesn't drink, doesn't smoke, never cusses – and apart from that wretched mole on his face, to this day he remains unblemished if bland in the extreme.

Now of course I'm not suggesting that young Quickthorpe is a mere country bumpkin with nothing more than straw between his ears. Just as I'm sure that he's an intellectual giant, not to mention being extremely nicely animated, hard as nails and hung like a Shire horse. So it just goes to show that you can't judge a guy by his name, which quite frankly has to be one of the ponciest in the entire history of computer games.

affairs – or rather they can, but they're keeping very much schtum on the subject because it's all too perilous – which is fantasy talk and translates as 'extremely bloody dangerous and likely to lead to sudden death'.

The naming of parts

Then you come along. Your delightful moniker is Quickthorpe, presumably because the local library was all out of those helpful *My Baby's Name* books and your parents couldn't be bothered to make the trek into town for a copy, so they just called you after the nearest colliery. If that wasn't bad enough, you look a bit of a dork with your poncey tunic, brushed cotton leggings (lycra-free, so watch out for those knee bags) and your Simon le Bon haircut. Nevertheless, you are indeed the hero of the game, so when the time comes for someone to accept the perilous challenge, you have little choice but to step up and take on the unpleasant – and almost certainly fatal – task. (Apparently,
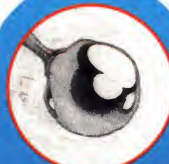
should you succeed, you've been promised a new name, some surf pants and a decent haircut. Makes it all worth it then, doesn't it?) The quest before you will largely involve wandering from one benighted land to another in a non-linear manner, talking with assorted entertaining characters about their excessive use of talcum powder, dodging a quick stab in the kidneys, and attempting to find four elemental jewels which, when combined with a little olive oil, some garlic and a finely-chopped chili and simmered at a low heat, will restore the Four Seasons to the Balkhanes. (Our culinary correspondent however, says you'd be much better off with the Walker Brothers, as not only do they have deeper voices, but they are also purveyors of far superior crisps.)

But as if all this wasn't enough of an endurance just to earn a little sartorial recompense, even after you've done all of the above, you still don't get the clothes, the haircut or the normal name until you've gone off again. This time round you have to seek out Ye Archive which is… well, an archive… and which will finally help you to make some sense out of the bloody game. By the way, it apparently has a list of really cool names at the back, so we reckon it's worth it. (Yeah, there's "Red" and "Rango" and stuff – and that's just under 'R'.) And then it will be the end of the game. Phew.

You take the dead man's gold key.

Whooaa!!! Scaaaaaaary!!!

Venturing into the world of facts

As you've probably already surmised from the screenshots, we are firmly in point-and-click adventure country here. Not only that, but we are talking lush, hi-res SVGA graphics with a 1970's fantasy concept rock album feel – loads of high pointy turrets and horribly complicated gnarled roots sticking out of the ground, bold men with improbable shoulderpads and bridges that look quite nice but tend to fall a little short on the practical side of things as they usually fail to extend to the other side of an abyss.

All the backdrops have been drawn by hand, then scanned in and coloured using one of those new-fangled computer things (apparently it's easier to avoid going over the edges). You can also see some of the original drawings scattered about these pages – just check out that masterly utilisation of chiaroscuro, babe. We're talking state of the art animation of the things wandering about in front of these backdrops too, which come courtesy of an ex-Disney employee (however we're not told why said employee left – perhaps 'ex' got caught drawing an oversized hairy organ on Mickey, or something).

Happy talky talky happy talk

We are now in the realm of character interaction galore and multiple choice conversations where, as is traditional in games such as these, it's usually inadvisable to take the smart-arse option, however appealing it may seem on the surface. (As in: "And verily, my lord, 'tis clear you've got a face like a dagged-up chimpanzee's arse! Aha-ha!" "Gua-aaaards! Castrate him!" GAME OVER: THE EVIL MIGHT OF THE PHWARTPHT EMPIRE HAS TRIUMPHED; YOUR PARENTS ARE PUT TO THE SWORD AND YOUR FAITHFUL DOG BINKY DEFLOWERED BY A WATER BUFFALO. ROLL CREDITS.)

As you'd expect in these enlightened times, you'll be presented with the full monty in the conversational by-play

another work experience kid in the *zone* office discovers what happens when you masturbate with both hands.

department, with individual voices for all the characters to be provided by a range of as yet unnamed stars. (Insiders tell us that apparently Cilla Black, Murray Walker, Lester Piggott and Teasy-Weasy are all up there on the shortlist of top-class voice artistes.) Or maybe it was someone else, or perhaps a different conversation altogether. Ah well.

There are billions (well, lots, anyway) of locations, all of which are chocka with strange, scarcely-credible monsters (think Tufnell Park on a Friday night) and a mythical world quite unlike anything ever witnessed on the PC. We're also promised an intelligent command interface that allows the player to make complex decisions based on the current in-game situation (which, as any experienced adventure-games player will know, is always preferable to just pressing everything at random regardless of the current in-game situation). And most importantly of all – and not just for us but for the PC industry as a whole (and possibly the benefit of all mankind) – we're talking fully-optimised Microsoft Windows 95™ version a-go-go. Where's that Bill Gates?… Bill? C'meeeeeere… I love ya, big guy… (smack).

developer: Symbiosis
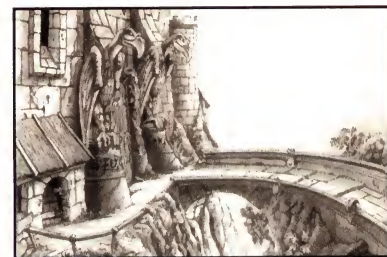**release date:** Mid 96

each scene in the game is rendered from...
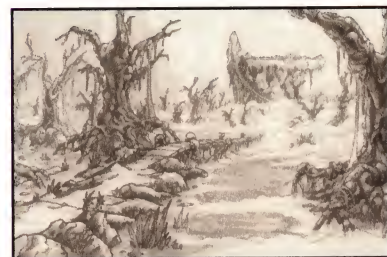
...an initial sketch...

...and as you can see...

the finished article is simply sumptuous

how chronic wind can prove a most effective weapon.

*H*alt oh tiny stranger! Nobody gets past the mighty Titan.

when we asked charlie brooker to have a look at *starfighter 3000*, we could not have foreseen the profound effect it would have on him - his visions of the future would scare even big arnie himself...

Starfighter

The time has come to hit the fast forward button on the great big astrological clock, folks, because *Starfighter 3000* is set in the giddyingly futuristic 31st century – and to think you assumed that the human race wouldn't make it past the 20th. Well, it looks like that nervy millennial angst was all in vain; there was no nuclear war, no worldwide ebola-style plague (which is just as well really – can you imagine how much mess there would've been if a flesh-melting virus had reduced the lot of us to slippery puddles of unappetising slop?), and nor was there a gigantic meteorite on the cards. Phew – we made it.

Mind you, that's not to say that the future's gloriously rosy either. Sadly, the human race has failed to evolve slowly but surely into some *Star Trek*-style tribe of super-intelligent beings who despise armed conflict and the works of Babylon Zoo in equal measure, have big pointy foreheads, names like 'Enlightened One', and a uniform of unflattering white robes.

1 3 0 0

3do dodo doh!

Starfighter 3000 first leapt to life as a 3DO game, but in case you're not familiar with that particular platform, pour yourself a stiff drink, fasten yourself in, and let me explain...

Before the current wave of 'next generation' 32-bit consoles (the ones that wear pony tails, quaff smart drinks, and are on first-name terms with both of the Chemical Brothers) were born, there was an early challenger to the 'Super Console' throne – the clumsily-monikered 3DO. The 3DO was, in fact, a bloody good idea – an attempt to create a global videogame standard (in the manner that, say, VHS has become the standard for video recorders), which could be licensed to different manufacturers, for which more or less anybody could develop a game. Panasonic and Goldstar both released versions of the system and, as the first games began to show their faces, things looked pretty good. There were millions of colours on-screen, mucho 3D hi-jinks and impressive stereo soundtracks. Hooray! Or nearly...

The main problem was that the first releases on the 3DO system were undoubtedly good-looking, but pretty crap in the playability department. The long wait for a definitive 'must-have' title to appear was further frustrated by the fact that the joypads supplied with the machines (for both the Panasonic and the Goldstar models) were appallingly crap. By the time Sega and Sony had launched their altogether sexier platforms (backed, in Sony's case, with a far superior marketing campaign), the 3DO was more or less a dead duck.

But that's not to say the system was a complete flop. Although it had never had a 'killer title' of its own (compared to *Tekken* on the PSX, or *Doom* on the PC for example), it did spawn a number of quality releases – notably *PO'ed*, *Return Fire* and, of course, *Starfighter* – and it also brought the pleasures of many a PC classic (*Theme Park*, *Syndicate*, *Wing Commander III* et al) within the reach of the console user. However, the 3DO story may not be completely over yet: the fabled 'M2' add-on/system (allegedly more powerful than Nintendo's upcoming 64-bit console) may still see the light of day, saving thousands of existing owners from neglected-machine misery and winning new converts in the process. Time alone will tell. (Oh – incidentally, there's an utterly abysmal version of *Doom* available for it, too.)

3000

Not on your nelly. We have mastered the art of space travel, and created fantastical high-speed intergalactic craft to shimmy about in – but instead of using this new technology to seek out different lifeforms and civilisations, spreading wisdom, peace, and attractively-priced presentation gift boxes of authentic Scottish shortbread throughout the galaxy, we've gone and stuck loads of lasers and missiles on the things and then gotten ourselves embroiled in all manner of deep-space barneys. Typical, isn't it. We are the Millwall supporters of the universe.

Still, there's no point in complaining. Not when you've got a nifty little space fighter to zip around in. And especially when you're armed to the teeth to boot.

Things that make you go boom

If the title, and indeed some of these screenshots, seem a little familiar to some of you out there, it's because *Starfighter 3000* originally appeared on the 3DO system in mid-1995. The game received a

rapturous reception from the three or four people in Europe who actually owned a 3DO, so its resurrection on the PC is an event worthy of much celebration.

What you see here is a good indication of what to expect. *Starfighter* is a veritable feast of 3D blasting, with the majority of the action taking place above skilfully-designed landscapes. However, unlike most games of this ilk, the landscape can be subjected to all manner of hi-tech vandalism. Drop a load of bombs onto a city, for instance, and not only will the buildings shatter and explode, but the ground beneath them will catch fire too.

> a significant level of detail can be seen in the backdrops, and this is particularly evident at low level.

Better yet, it's possible to start off massive 'chain reactions', in which one explosion causes another, then another, and then yet another, leading to a kind of localised Armageddon, the likes of which hasn't been seen in the gaming world since that level in *Doom 2* where every single square inch of floor space was occupied by a hazardous oil barrel.

Indeed, if destroying all and sundry is very much your 'thang', *Starfighter* is likely to be right up your street. Your craft finds itself continually assailed by a fearsome variety of enemy forces – one minute there's a whole slew of anti-aircraft

innovations 3000

Aside from building breathtakingly impressive intergalactic starfighter craft, the 31st century also sees the human race enjoying a massive range of similarly cool inventions. Here, just for the sheer goddamn hell of it, are some of the wondrous widgets and gizmos that will doubtless be gracing the pages of *Innovations* catalogues in years to come.

Brain Back-up Disks

The Brain Back-up Disk is a miniature hard drive which is capable of storing the entire contents of a single human mind. Should your body get destroyed in a horrible accident, your grieving relatives can simply download the information held on the disk into the brain of a replacement back-up body, thereby bringing you back to life. Storage space ranges from 16 billion trilobytes (ideal for quantum physicists) to 48k (for people who come from Norwich).

Nanotechnology Machines

Nanotechnology is officially the coolest thing ever. Put simply, it's a method of rearranging the layout of individual molecules within a substance, thereby turning it into something – anything – else. For instance, you could take a pile of horse manure and 'nanotechnologise' it into a great big wad of £50 notes. Actually, that isn't so futuristic at all, really. Jim Davidson's been doing it for years.

Stairlift Racecourses

You know those 'Stannah Chairlift' things that they sell to invalid grandmothers who can't climb their own stairs? Well, by the year 3000 we'll have built huge arenas with bloody great twirly, roller-coaster style chairlift rails in them. OAPs will race against eachother before a worldwide television audience, with the winners receiving a huge cash prize while the losers are set upon by a gang of dockworkers armed with pre-sharpened hoes.

blasting the bejesus out of buildings can be a very satisfying pursuit, and you don't need to be over 18, either.

missiles being fired up your tailpipe, the next there's a gigantic space cruiser looming before you with more weaponry at its disposal than the average South London teenager (and that's saying something). And that's not even taking into account the hundreds of smaller opposition fighter craft who'll be after your blood as well.

The overall game comprises over 50 different missions, spread across four different levels. Mission structures vary wildly, with straightforward and simple reconnaissance jaunts rubbing shoulders with full-on maniacal battles to the very death, which feature more retina-searing laserbeam action than you'll find in the entire *Star Wars* trilogy put together. But this doesn't mean that *Starfighter* will have nothing more to offer than what'd you get from a simple arcade blaster. Far from it – certain scenarios require the player to use the old grey matter a little. For starters, the

missions are structured in a non-linear fashion, so the order in which they are completed can affect the difficulty of subsequent sorties. Failure to knock out a vital enemy radar station, for instance, might make the ensuing campaign altogether more taxing, not to mention deadly. More significantly, there's also the opportunity to seize command of entire squadrons in the time-honoured *Wing Commander* fashion. Up to ten wingmen can be bossed around at any one time, so the best course of action may well be to brush up on your personnel management skills before rashly leaping into the cockpit.

Looking good...

The bulk of the action in *Starfighter 3000* takes place above fully three-dimensional landscapes, from attractive, skyscraper-stuffed cityscapes, to picturesque natural wonders. Everything in the game is fully texture-mapped and plenty of detail has been packed in, right down to the inclusion of realistically 'wobbly' water for the lakes and oceans. Although the game seems to have been designed primarily for play in the familiar 'chase' camera view, a sophisticated and versatile multi-camera system enables the player to keep an eye

on bogeys from more or less any angle – dead handy for players with heavy colds.

Fortunately, in spite of all the processor-bashing demanded by something this complex, the frame rate (in the preview version, at any rate) seems to be more than adequately fluid. The city-based levels appear especially impressive, as the towers below spin smoothly around to match your continually changing viewpoint. With all this 3D jiggery-pokery in evidence, it's perhaps not surprising that *Starfighter 3000* is being simultaneously developed for the Sony PlayStation. Hopefully the PC version will be able to hold its own against this young upstart.

The fruits of Krisalis' labour will be revealed later this year. And by jove – should we fail to bring you a fully-fledged review at the earliest available opportunity, you can tie us to a wine rack and beat our arses with a straw broom. Come to think of it, we'd like you to do that anyway.

developer: Krisalis
release date: Summer 96

> all the elements in *starfighter 3000* have been constructed from texture-mapped polygons.

Onside

Strategy 1
Strategy 2
Strategy 3
Strategy 4

Milan 0

it's the year of the european championships, and another football game is getting ready for kick-off. a scarf-waving patrick mccarthy dons the inflammable tracksuit...

T hose visionaries who spout confident predictions to anyone who will listen that Planet Earth is destined for total overpopulation of the human race (hence all those *Bladerunner*-like visions of the future in popular culture), might like to cast their gaze at the games industry instead and rethink their calculations. I suspect that they'll find that in milleniums to come, our planet will be overrun, not by whoever the current market leaders in procreation might be (estate agents, more than likely), but by computer football simulations. In years to come, younger generations will look up at us with a weary eye from their allocated place between the brightly coloured cardboard boxes and ask, "Grandad, why did people need *so many* football games?" New games will only be allocated a release date when someone dies (or passes away, or falls asleep, is merely resting, or whatever your chosen euphemism might be), at which point the space formerly taken up by their body can then be occupied by a football title. And we will have no answer for these futuristic interrogators with their youthfully innocent questions and their fine naked bodies. Because we did nothing.

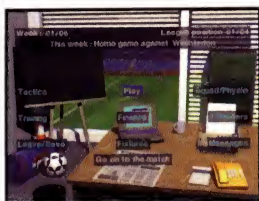pick a flag, any flag...

pick a ball, any ball...

your chance to rule as chairman.

Resume play

Sorry about that. Put it down to the sad fact that I've been watching too much BBC2 of late. It's giving me all sorts of

Manchester C 0 Inter Milan 0   14:15

gyp – dizzy spells; a very disturbing part-Cornish, part-Eskimo accent which means nobody understands a word I say when I go shopping and I'm forced to writing everything down; a purple corduroy shirt and a brown suede tie... where was I? Ah yes. Football games. New.

Football games. New.

Onside is Telstar's contribution to the European Football Game Mountain, and like Psygnosis' upcoming *adidas Power Soccer* (*aPS*), it's an arcade game which features teams from more than one league around Europe. Where *aPS* enlists teams from the premier leagues in England, France and Germany, along with selected sides from each country's second divisions and fictional players, *Onside* serves up select crews from England, France, Germany and Italy. Unlike the Psygnosis' offering, it uses the proper team and player names: where *Power Soccer* sees the likes of "Manchester Maine" pitting what

they laughingly call their skills against all-comers, *Onside* will have the more traditional "Manchester C" – which should win approval from the Gallagher brothers and the team's other 12 fans if no one else. Incidentally, getting all these leagues in one go makes a nice change from being given just the one and then having to pay through the nose for the others that follow.

And while we're on the subject of team names, we've never quite been able to fathom why some games adopt fictional team names for fear of upsetting various arcane copyright laws, when there are others (like *Sensi* for example) which use real team and player names, seemingly without paying for the privilege, and yet get away with it. And after this we'll probably find that the truth remains just as elusive as ever – it's just another of those mysteries that will follow us through life, and which we'll remember on our deathbeds with a pang of regret that we never solved them. Like that 'saucy' ad for throat pastilles – has someone really achieved the impossible and invented a cough sweet that pampers you with soothing kisses, or are they trying to fool you into believing that they're the

Manchester C 0 Inter Milan 0   45:00

Manchester C 0 Inter Milan 0

nearest thing to virtual reality? Or why nobody delivered a fatal bullet to Gaby Roslin the first time she appeared on our screens? Ho hum.

Now for something a little different

This team-tastic approach isn't the only asset to make the game stand out from the herd. Taking its life in its hands, it aims to provide that Holy Grail of computer football games – the combined arcade and management game – successful examples of which have so far been rarer than an Arsenal team without a convicted felon in it. No one has yet succeeded in combining the two styles of gameplay, simply because they appear to work against each other. If the arcade part is any good and you become reasonably proficient at it, even if you have the tactical capablities of a lobotomised goldfish you can still gain a degree of success. Conversely, your managment and tactical skills may be up there with Rinus Michels, but if your hand-eye co-ordination is on a par with a sponge, or if the arcade gameplay is simply weak, no amount of managerial wheeler-dealing and tactical nous will save you. But the fearless Telstar are willing to have a go, and to this end are furnishing you with the option to play the game either in arcade style, or as a management simulation (a mode which allows you to watch a whole game, see the highlights, or just get the final score), or as a combination of the two. And if it all comes off, the world will indeed rejoice.

The player graphics are of the old-fashioned sprite-based type, rather than any of that new-fangled motion-capturing shenanigans that

Increase tilt
Decrease tilt
Zoom in
Zoom out
Rotate clockwise
Rotate anticlockwise
Default settings
OK

Manchester C 0 Inter Milan 0   13:11

Next player   Tony Coton
                   Goalkeeper
Previous player
Substitute   Condition :
Cancel   Excellent
Manchester C 0 Inter Milan 0   45:00

is apparently *de rigeur* these days. One of the advantages to be had here however is that once you've pressed a button there's no waiting around for the painfully beautiful animation to get into gear and for your player to actually respond to your various commands: simply hit a button, and it happens. Another bonus is that it takes less processing power, so it all runs a lot faster and you can enjoy a quicker, more action-packed game. (And, of course, being British, this is an aspect we can naturally appreciate – even more so if there's a corresponding lowering of the skill level, some good scraps and the odd opportunity to invade the pitch and deliver some abuse to the Chairman.)

It's a fair old crack

The animation (over 7000 frames of it) seems smooth enough, and the game certainly cracks along at a fair old rate; you can also move the camera to whatever angle you want to watch the action (including a first-person perspective and an innovative, if somewhat unhelpful, ball's eye view). The graphics even register pitch damage as the game progresses. Add to this the Greedy Bastard Chairman Option to create a Superleague from any of the top sides – and there are more of them than there are Manchester United fans in south east London – and you have a football game that could well prove significantly more inspiring than anything Arsenal could ever come up with.

developer: Elite
release date: Mid 96

Centrecourt

as the song goes, summer's here and the time is ripe for... well, a good old-fashioned game of tennis actually. but patrick mccarthy will have to make do with a hi-tech modern one, sorry ol' chum.

Say the word tennis to most people and it'll doubtless conjure up images of Wimbledon fortnight: strawberries and cream on offer at a price-to-weight ratio slightly higher than black market plutonium; pastel-clad *Daily Mail* readers queuing overnight for the supreme privilege of watching fat birds in headbands running about in the sun (and then sitting about in pac-a-macs eating homemade egg and cress sarnies in anticipation of the heaviest recorded rainfall since Noah's Ark to abate); co-ordinated tennis outfits that look like somebody's got pissed on vats of paint and then vomited over them... You cannot be serious! Oh, but we are...

Hail Carmichael!
Let's face it, just as an old school tie is essential to gain entry to select and stuffy clubs, so you shouldn't be allowed to play tennis in anything other than the proper clobber. Should you dare to flout form and approach the net in anything other than heavy white flannels (a stripey blazer is optional), the penalties should be at the very least a heavy fine, or even imprisonment. Wearing a headband should be a hanging offence – after all, you don't see Ian Carmichael wearing one when he plays tennis in *School For Scoundrels*, do you? He puts in the finest tennis-playing performance ever seen,

taking that bounder Terry Thomas apart without conceding a single game, and using a borrowed racquet to boot – and all he's wearing is a checked shirt and grey flannels, and a pair of those canvas plimsolls that have soles so thin you can hold onto the ground with your toes through 'em. Now that's what we call style.

While we're getting all retro about it, racquets should be made of wood, and should snap off at the handle if you lam the ball too hard. That's real tennis... Well, alright then, it isn't. 'Real Tennis' is where you whack a rolled-up ball of feathers, belly-button fluff and a certain coagulated fluid from a horse onto the roof of Hampton Court with a superannuated colander and shout stuff like, "Classic redoubt, Simmers old man..." Come to think of it, they don't wear the right clothes either... and if they're going to get all hoighty-toighty about playing 'Real Tennis', they should stroll out in tabards and codpieces and be done with it. But I digress. *(Just a bit – Ed.)* Back to that word tennis.

Ugly head
By contrast, utter the 'T' word to all right-thinking people and they'll immediately recall the long glorious summer days they've spent shut indoors with the curtains drawn, getting all pasty-faced and podgy playing *Super Tennis* on the SNES – easily the finest evocation of the sport ever created, and a game in which, once you were familiar with the range of shots available to you, offered all the intensity of top-class sport but without the lingering whiff of Ralgex and athlete's foot, or the embarrassment of having to deal with the sight of your opponent naked in the showers afterwards (unless you both wanted to, that is).

If you were going to level a criticism at the game though, you might say that the cutesy (or as the very poncey and anxious-

to-impress would say, "almost Super Deformed Manga-style") characters don't look so impressive in these hi-tech days of FMV footage, motion-captured animation and jeans with buttock-enhancing sections to lift and separate. And once again we have that old argument rearing its ugly (but beautifully coiffured, so we'll let that one go) head: simple graphics and seamless gameplay, as in *Super Tennis* on the SNES – or complex, state of the art

> do your best to adopt a suave air as you travel the world in dodgy shades.

> ma, the grass needs mowing! but even the menu screens are pretty, see?
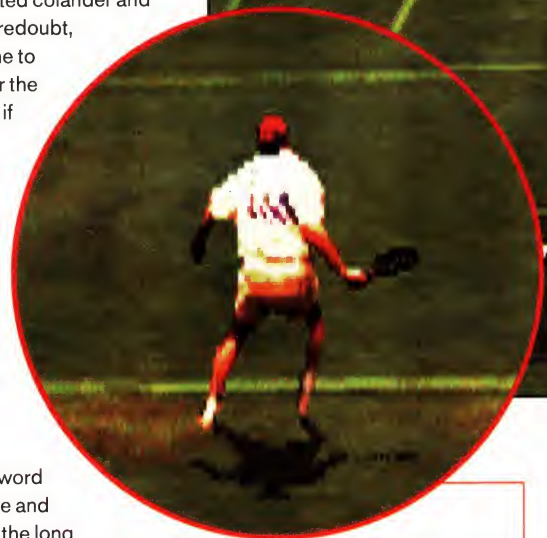
> people should only be permitted to wear the correct ' carmichael' clobber on court.

Tennis

JON COURT

PLAYER ONE SELECT CHARACTER

Telstar Systems

Vs Gary Johnston

Telstar Systems

all the players are super digitised sprites. in other words, they've got the fizz that gives them whizz.

look! look! this is his call. see how it sketches! hopefully it will still be his call down the pub after the game.

graphics and more ponderous gameplay as in oh, I don't know, *Philips' International Tennis Open*, on the PC?

Good grass, man

Which is where *Centrecourt Tennis*, Telstar's new entry into the ball-battering stakes, hurtles in. It hopes to do away with the old graphics versus gameplay argument altogether by combining digitised players and photo-realistic on-court graphics with fast, accurate and intuitive gameplay. How it will eventually perform still remains to be seen, but as you can see from the screenshots, they certainly seem to have got the graphical side of things right. Take that beautifully mown grass court for instance – looks good enough to eat, doesn't it? (The thought occurs that perhaps I've been

scoffing too much of this special offer British beef…) Mind you, it isn't clear yet whether you'll be allowed to have players in long trousers and proper shirts. I suspect we might be in for a disappointment there.

Realism

There's a two-player split-screen view along with options for up to four people to play at once. Now this is a mighty fine idea: one player will be able to hog the ball for hours at a time, then leave a difficult return for their partner so that they can plant the blame on them for losing the point. This will lead to an argument. Bitter recriminations will continue for the remainder of the match, along with sniping remarks about the size of certain people's bottoms as they bend over at the net. Ideally the opponents will join in and stir things up a bit, and the

whole thing will finish in a four-way punch up. Just like the real thing, in fact.

There are 24 major courts from around the world in a choice of clay, concrete and traditional grass court surfaces. This will enable respected tennis columnists to write lengthy essays about how too much clay court tennis is producing a generation of players who are happy to just sit at the back of the court, playing endless baseline rallies and boring the public to death. And others will be inspired to pen equally lengthy essays about how the combination of modern manufacturing techniques and fast grass courts are responsible for a generation of players who are incapable of rallies, reducing the game to a serve-and-volley shooting match and inducing a mutual public coma.

There's a fair variety of different players with different abilities to choose from too, plus an option to pack your world into a suitcase and embark on the professional circuit to live the life of the poor neglected millionaire sportsperson, with only a coterie of hangers-on, a limo driver and a selection of Class A drugs to ease the burden. Quite why some of them are wearing cowboy hats remains to be seen, but their sexual predilections are nobody's business but their own. And thank crikey they're not wearing headbands.

developer: The Dome
release date: Mid 96

Speed

charlie brooker's driving instructor now resides in a mental institution and lives in a twilight zone thanks to medication prescribed by the men in white coats - and all as a direct result of having failed to pass on even the most rudimentary motoring skills to his pupil...

Reasons why computer games are better than real life, Episode 17: Racing Games. In 'real life' I am one of those sorry souls who never got to rip up my L-plates. I failed my first and only driving test in miserable fashion years ago – in hindsight I think it was due to an imminent head-on collision which was only averted because the examiner slammed on his set of brakes and bellowed, "Calm down!". And this was in spite of the frankly ludicrous number of lessons beforehand (and we're talking more than 30 here). Since this unhappy incident, the world of motoring has, as far as I'm concerned, been a closed book. I now have no alternative but to resort to public transport, or my feet, to get from A to B. I'm hard pressed to identify one make of car from another, and I don't even know what a 'clutch' does. I'm that sad, or perhaps fortunate, depending on your point of view.

But hey – this is 'real life' we're talking about, and we all know how dull that is. In the alternative reality of computer games, I'm perfectly capable of driving almost any vehicle you care to mention, around any course you can think of, with consummate skill and more than a little flair. I've driven minis, trucks, tanks, go-karts, motorbikes... you name it, I've done it mate. Records have been smashed, corners cut, death-defying skids skilfully controlled. And I've never once had to blow a stack of cash on petrol or repairs, never found myself stuck at the lights or at the mercy of the AA, and nor have I ever had my windscreen wiped by a surly adolescent with a bucketful of murky water and a squeegee liberally

it's not just other cars you have to worry about, and god help you if culky hits the track.

dotted with dead aphids. Best of all, the thorny problem of exactly what a 'clutch' is (or even worse, 'clutch control') has never been an issue.

Well, now I'm about to add two new vehicles to my list of conquests, thanks to *Speed Rage*, a whizzy-looking racing game in which drivers compete head-to-head in a selection of sand dune buggies or futuristic speedboats (or 'Completeats' as the game will call them, which makes them sound rather like some kind of breast-feeding aid you might see advertised in a Sunday supplement). The emphasis is placed firmly on arcade-style hi-jinks, so there's no need to fret about which gear you're in (or what a clutch is – ha!). Imagine

a next-generation combination of *Super Mario Kart* and *Micro Machines* and you will have got the general idea.

Rootin' tootin' swervin' shootin'

Careering around sharp hairpin turns and overtaking the opposition simply isn't enough for some people, so Telstar have seen fit to equip each and every vehicle with a handy range of Colin Culk-style hood-mounted missile launchers and the like, all the better for blasting the bejesus out of more or less anything that dares pass before you. Beefy explosions are the order of the day, making the overall experience somewhat akin to an unusually

backgrounds are very quick indeed thanks to the use of sprites rather than polygons cars.

Rage

frenetic instalment of *Wacky Races*. It all takes place in a futuristic time zone in which civilised society has completely broken down and heavy artillery is given away as a freebie with boxes of Crunchy Nut Cornflakes (a dubious name for a breakfast cereal if ever I heard one). This is good news for psychopaths with limited driving skills – should you manage to murder absolutely everybody else in the race, you will then be the winner by default.

Still not good enough for you? Cuh, I don't know. Just as well then that there's a plethora of other life-threatening hazards to hold your attention. Admit it, there's nothing quite like a ginormous great ramp to liven up a racing game, and heavens to betsy if *Speed Rage* hasn't got a whole wheelbarrow-full of these too – not to mention the odd water hazard. For the more adventurous among you, there's also the opportunity to deviate from the standard course layout and discover hidden bonus areas and shortcuts. Hooray. And speaking of levels, there's more than 20 of the beggars lined up, each of them more cunning and perilous than the last.

But the potential for fun doesn't end there, because catering for those of you who aren't pathetic lonely bastards with bad teeth lies a multitude of multi-player modes at your disposal, while all the couples out there can enjoy a simultaneous two-player split screen mode – so instead of playing with yourself,

at long last you now have the option to argue about who goes on top. 'Swinging' players will be rubbing their sweaty, sticky palms with unsettling glee at the inclusion of a downright sordid 16-person network option in which everybody gets down and dirty with everybody else, all at the same time, in a kind of buggy/powerboat bump 'n' grind orgy, riddled with plenty of loud bangs. And joystick-jiggling. And clutches. These 16-way workouts can all be found in a special place known as 'The Speed Arena', although for the sake of authenticity I personally reckon that they should stage the whole shebang in a living room in Purley with a handful of *News Of The World* reporters scattered outside behind the bushes for good measure.

Sure is purdy

Perhaps the best news, or at least as far as eco-terrorists are concerned, is that *Speed Rage* utilises 'an innovative sprite-based engine'. We are still awaiting confirmation as to whether the engines will also run on Tango, Coca-Cola and Mountain Dew, but it's certainly a great step forward for the environment as a whole (not to mention the manufacturers of Sprite). Anyway, this sprite engine has been optimised for Pentium processors, so the game should run at a lightning pace (which, if what

if dune buggies aren't enough, you also get a choice of aqua-tastic speed boats.

why on earth these things are called 'completeats' is beyond any of us, and please, we beg you, no suggestions on a postcards. thanks for listening.

aha! the big arrow says turn left. eügh! but there's a dirty great mine in the way. could this be a dirty trick?


we've seen so far is anything to go by, it does). It doesn't look too sparse either – not only are the vehicles and most of the landscapes fully texture-mapped, but there's also a generous helping of light-sourcing and shading splashed all over the shop. So if you fancy a nice leisurely sight-seeing drive, you could do a lot worse than check this out. Seeing the demo in action, I was thrilled to note that all the buggies have proper suspension and big bouncy wheels too.

Anyhow, it all seems to be shaping up rather daintily, so if you're partial to a bit of a burn-out, you'll have to keep the old engine ticking over until the end of this month when *Speed Rage* is due for release. Perhaps by then I might have discovered just what the hell a 'clutch' actually is, but then again I'll probably remain happy in my sweet ignorance. Whatever.

developer: Hexerei
release date: May
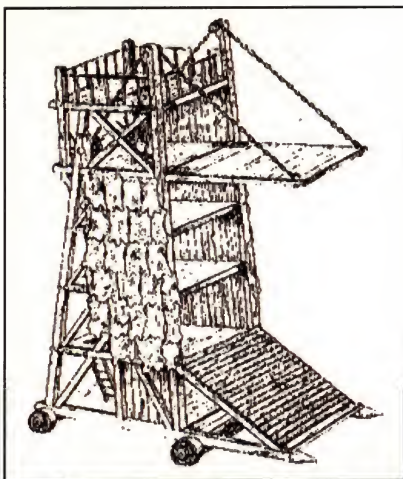
of course, the games highlighted in this supplement are not the only gems in the telstar portfolio because as john davison discovers, there are other projects simmering away in various stages of development too.

The

Siege

developer: Telstar Electronic Studios

Visualise if you can a sort of polygon-generated *Command & Conquer* style game, add a dash of *Warcraft II*, spruce the graphics up a bit and then throw in some knights in shining armour… and you should have a fairly good approximation of what the team at Telstar Electronic Studios is working towards with *Siege*.

Although *Siege* is still very much in the early stages of development (the release date is tentatively set for around Christmas at the earliest), the evidence so far indicates that it could hike the action strategy genre up a level or two in the old presentation stakes. Imagine picking off bits of a castle with a battering ram and individual polygon-generated building blocks falling to the ground – there's none of that 'three stages of destruction' sprite-generated stuff that you get in *C&C* and *Dune II*. Alternatively, how about a spot of one-on-one combat with little knights and warriors beating the almighty shit out of each other with swords and other rather large pointy things?

Unsurprisingly, *Siege* is one of Telstar's closely guarded secrets, but keep 'em peeled for more news nuggets in *PC Zone* over the coming months.

we can't show you any screenshots of siege yet, but we can tell you that all the polygon-generated models have been built based on comprehensive sketches.

Wrecking Crew

wrecking crew. get ready to blast the crap out of your opponents in your hot-rod! its full potential should be realised when it's up and running across a 32-player network.

developer: Quickdraw Development

With *Speed Rage* nearing completion (see page 16), Telstar have another racing

DJ Fresh

developer: Abstract Studios

Harking back to the good ol' days of adventure/platform games such as *Sabrewulf*, *Alien8* and *Knight Lore*, *DJ Fresh* exerts a new twist on the old isometric-style game that proved so popular on the Spectrum. Set in a mysterious Dream World, we soon learn that all the children are having terrible nightmares and are now in such a state of terror that they refuse to go to sleep. No one knows what to do, and when the appropriate authorities have given up hope (they have appropriate authorities to deal with people's dreams?!), the powers that be decide that their only option is to stage a competition to find a hero who can put things right (Yep – that's exactly what

we'd do). Sack races, egg and spoon races, er… finding something in a big pile of flour with your hands tied behind your back, tail on the donkey and that kind of stuff. Just the job for tracking down that elusive individual who has the power to banish bad dreams. Fair enough. Anyway, the competition does indeed take place, and by the time the considerable mess it creates has been cleaned up, a hero is revealed… DJ Fresh.

The only problem confronting you now though is that DJ Fresh is a… erm… don't

laugh, he's a radish – and er… a radical radish at that (or so sayeth the design notes anyway). Armed with weapons such as chewing gum, cans of spray paint and a baseball hat, this monstrously powerful (well, he is a root vegetable after all) runs off to save Dream World from the evil powers unleashing the nightmares.

Featuring beautifully crisp SVGA visuals and 'back to basics' gameplay, it's safe to say that *DJ Fresh* should make an interesting departure from the likes of what you typically see on the PC.

dj fresh harks back to the days of isometric platform/adventure style gaming. all the graphics have been rendered in svga, so you can expect the central radish character to look frighteningly realistic.

Road Ahead...

game on the way in the shape of *Wrecking Crew* – a product which the developers describe as a "return to traditional game-play values". It's basically a 3D hot-rod racer which features combat and stunt driving to complement the usual screaming around a racetrack action. Rather than adopting the 'simulation' aspect of racing games that are so popular on the PC (*NASCAR*, *F1GP2*, *IndyCar*... etc etc), Quickdraw have instead looked to the likes of *Mario Kart* (SNES) and *Powerdrift* (arcade) for inspiration, and they stand firm that emphasising the enjoyment factor over realism will win through in the end.

Although at this point there's very little to see on the game, the team clearly has some ambitious plans for it – hi-res SVGA visuals, polygon-generated backdrops and an incredible 32-player network facility. Okay, so you'd only be able to play it in a well-equipped office (unless it will support dial-in networking as well), but blimey, something like this could lead to an entire company grinding to a halt. As yet no release date has been set, but catch *PC Zone* for more news as we get it.

> in terms of graphics, *excalibur* looks set to be a bit like *alone in the dark*... but with a much sharper edge.

Excalibur

developer: Tempest Software

Out of Telstar's releases for this year, perhaps one of the most impressive is the rather awesome looking *Alone In The Dark*-alike, *Excalibur*. Set initially in the far future, the game deals with a civilisation which has taken to living underground as a result of a meteor colliding with the earth. Since relocating to the labyrinths, it seems that everyone has gotten incredibly stroppy and that something must be done to unite the people. Following close scrutiny of the history books, it's decided that getting hold of the sword Excalibur would be "a good thing", so a plan is hatched to send someone back in time to bring it back to the future. Cunning, eh?

The plan is inevitably successful, but it appears that Arthur and his trusty sidekick Merlin are understandably a tad miffed. Having indulged in throwing things around to vent their angst, they eventually sketch out a way to steal the sword back again. After a bout of beard-stroking and head-scratching, Merlin discovers that he can transport someone to the future, but only one person can undertake such a journey – his niece Beth.

As you'd expect, it's when Beth arrives in the future that the game picks up, and your brief is to guide her through the rather groovy looking 3D adventure to recover Arthur's pride and joy. In true *Alone In The Dark* fashion, there's both puzzle-solving and combat – but for some added fun you also get some spells to lob at people too.

As you can see from the screen shots, the game appears to be shaping up rather nicely, and it's estimated to hit the shops some time before Christmas this year.
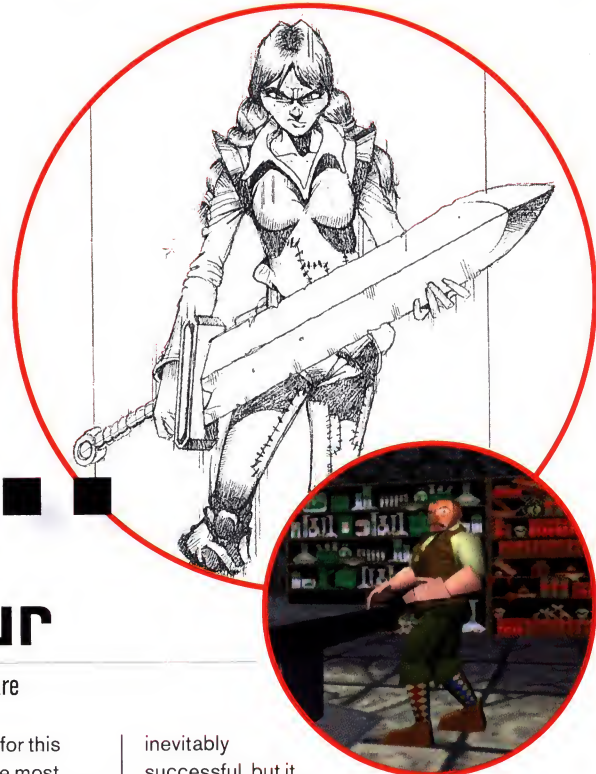
Star System

developer: Twilight

Some way down the line on the Telstar schedule is another action/adventure title that tackles a subject matter which is rarely touched upon in games. Set in a solar system in which there are two inhabitable planets – one of which currently supports indigenous life – *Star System* tells of the struggle to rescue a dying ecosystem. Scientists on the habitable planet have discovered that if an emissary can be sent back in time to the other planet, they will be able to introduce amino acids to the genetic pool and hopefully sentient life will then evolve in the ensuing years – voilà! Mission accomplished.

And, as you can probably guess, you are the poor bastard who gets lumbered with the job of time-travelling in reverse in order to sort the whole sorry mess out.

Although ideally suited to a snorey strategy game, the gameplay in *Star System* will be more of an action adventure where you will have direct control over your little scientist bloke as he roams around playing god in his attempt to tease life from the primeval swamps.

> play god and fiddle around with amino acids and other weird stuff in the forthcoming action adventure *star system*.

TELSTAR
Electronic Studios
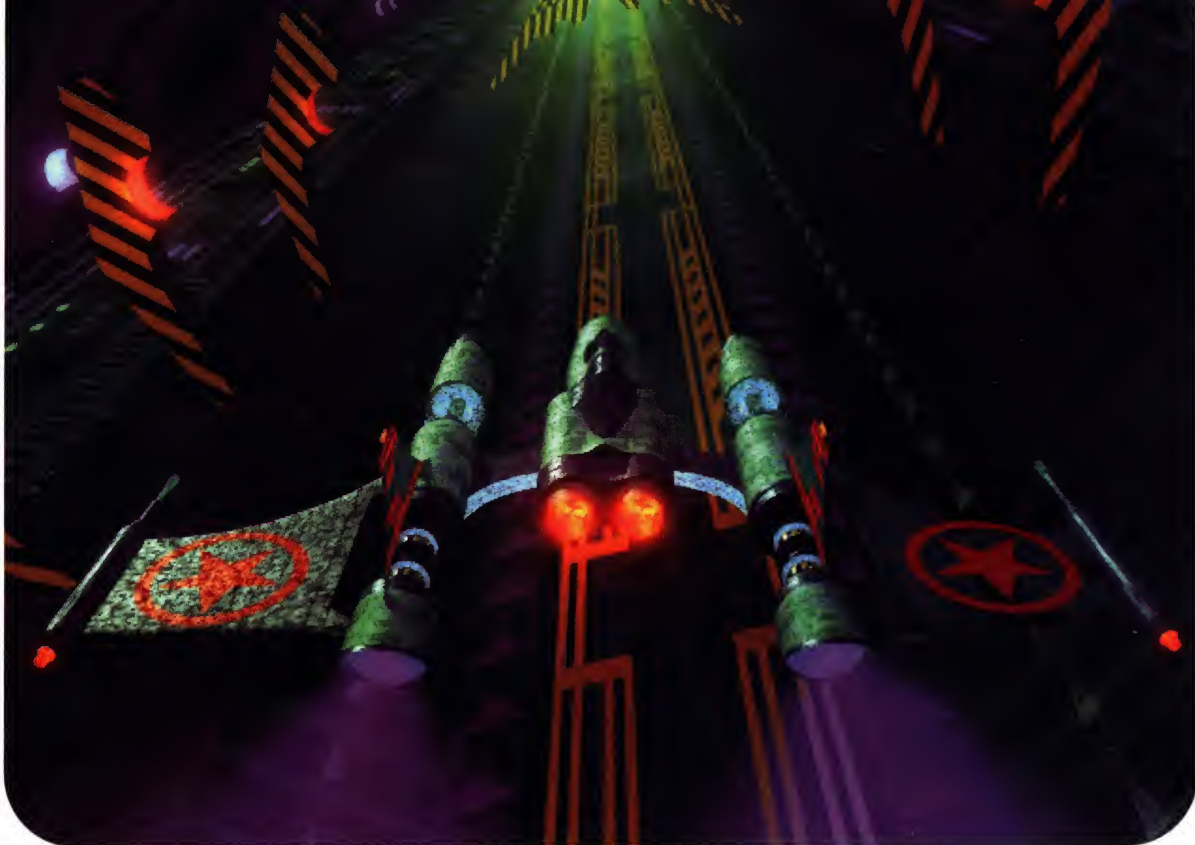
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